

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 4, Revelation 1

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everybody. We're diving deep today. And get this, we're tackling Revelation.

Ooh, Revelation. Yeah, I know, right? Fire and brimstone, the end of the world, all that jazz. Well, not so fast.

Today, we're taking a more scholarly approach. We're looking at Dr. Mathewson's lecture on Revelation chapter one, and he brings a really interesting academic perspective to this often misunderstood book. Yeah.

A lot of people just think of it as predicting the future. Right. Just doom and gloom.

Yeah. But it's so much more than that. And Dr. Mathewson really unpacks that for us.

In fact, he splits chapter one into two parts. You've got verses one to eight, which set the stage, and then verses nine to 20, where we get this really vivid vision of Jesus. Yeah.

And what Dr. Mathewson really highlights is that in Revelation, it's Jesus Christ who is doing the revealing, not just the one being revealed. That's a great point. It's like a direct line of communication from God to Jesus, then to an angel, and finally to John.

Exactly. A chain of Revelation. So it's not just some guy having a wild dream.

It's a message with some serious authority behind it. But there's this word that keeps popping up: testimony. So does that mean Revelation's all about martyrdom? Like that's what we often hear, right? That's a good question.

Um, you know, testimony didn't automatically equal martyrdom back then, but John definitely knew that standing up for Christ could cost you. I mean, look at Antipas. He's mentioned in the text; he was martyred for his beliefs.

Right. It's like a window into the pressure cooker of early Christianity under Roman rule. But Dr. Mathewson doesn't stop there.

He also argues that prophecy and Revelation aren't just about predicting the future; they're also about inspiring action in the present. Absolutely. It's a call to obedience and faithfulness.

Right. Like, don't just sit around waiting for the world to end. Live your faith now.

Exactly. And remember the blessing promised to those who hear and heed the prophecy. That's a pretty big deal.

Yeah. No kidding. So it's a living, breathing message for every generation.

And speaking of structure, Revelation is actually written as a letter, right? It is addressed to seven specific churches in Asia Minor, right under Roman noses, basically. Wow. Okay.

So we've got prophecy, testimony, a letter format, and then right from the get-go, Dr. Mathewson points out this Trinitarian theme. Oh yeah, absolutely. God, the Father, the Son, and, uh, the seven spirits.

Oh, hold on. Rewind that for a second. Seven spirits.

Yeah. Is that suggesting there's more than one Holy Spirit? Good catch. No, it's not saying there are seven Holy Spirits.

Right. Most scholars see this as representing the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It's about emphasizing God's presence and power.

Okay. So one Holy Spirit, just amplified times seven. I get it.

Yeah. So we've got prophecy, testimony, the Trinity. What else is packed into this introduction? Well, this is where things start to get interesting with the Roman Empire.

See, the word throne appears pretty early on. And Dr. Mathewson argues that this is a direct challenge to Caesar. Really? Yeah.

Caesar saw himself as the ultimate ruler, you know, even claiming divinity sometimes. So John putting God on the throne- that was a pretty bold statement. So it's not just about spiritual beliefs.

It's about who holds the ultimate power. Right. It makes you wonder why some people say that John used all this symbolism to avoid getting in trouble with the Roman authorities, like to hide his message.

Yeah, that's a common theory. But Dr. Mathewson disagrees. He says the symbolism wasn't about hiding.

It was about confronting. I mean, any Roman official reading about a throne other than Caesar's would get the message. It wasn't subtle at all.

Wow. So the imagery was like a targeted missile, not camouflage. But then John throws in this imagery from Exodus, you know, talking about redemption and freedom through Christ's blood.

So what's he doing there? He's connecting the dots. He's saying that just like the Israelites were liberated from Egypt, early Christians are being liberated from Roman oppression. It's a new exodus.

A new exodus. I like that. And he takes it a step further by calling them a kingdom of priests.

What does that even mean? It's a really big idea. See, God originally wanted Israel to be a nation of priests representing him to the world. But that vision never quite worked out.

So now through Christ, we get this new community, the church. Like a global community of priests. Exactly.

United in service to God. And that undermines Roman authority even more. Absolutely.

It's like saying, hey, Caesar, step aside. There's a new kingdom in town with a different kind of king. And it's all right there in the first chapter.

I'm already seeing Revelation in a whole new light. This is way more than just predicting the apocalypse. And we haven't even gotten to John's vision of Christ yet.

I know, right? It's got a lot more to unpack. But before we dive into that, I want you to think about this kingdom of priests idea. If you're part of this new community, what does that mean for your life? How does that change the way you see yourself in the world? Think about it.

And we'll be right back to explore John's vision. Okay, so John's on this island, probably not the best vacation spot. Yeah, exiled for his faith.

Tough times. Right. But then he has this vision of Christ.

I'm picturing, I don't know, beams of light, angels singing. What does he actually see? It's pretty epic. So John, he hears this voice, like a trumpet blast.

And he turns around, and there's Jesus. Standing among seven golden lampstands. Seven golden lampstands.

Okay, that's pretty symbolic. Oh, yeah. But what about Jesus? What's he like in this vision? Well, John describes him wearing a robe down to his feet with a golden sash.

And his head and hair are white like snow, but his eyes, they're like blazing fire. Intense. Yeah.

And his feet are like glowing bronze. And his voice, it's like the roar of rushing water. Yeah, getting chills just thinking about it.

I mean, no wonder John falls at his feet. But wait, there's more, right? Oh, yeah. He's holding seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword is coming out of his mouth.

Whoa, that's some serious imagery. It is. It's meant to evoke awe and reverence.

But then, amidst all this intensity, Jesus says to John, "Don't be afraid. And he identifies himself as the first and the last. Right, that title.

Emphasizing his eternal nature and power. It's like another jab at Caesar. Exactly.

And this declaration comes right after that description of his incredible power. It's like John saying, Caesar may be calling the shots down here, but ultimately it's Jesus who holds the real authority. Yeah.

So it's not just Son of Man; it's Son of God. Right. And remember how John reacts.

He falls at Jesus's feet as if he's in the presence of God. Yeah. It's making that connection clear.

Right. And to make things even clearer, Jesus says, I am the living one. I was dead.

And now look, I am alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades. That is a powerful statement, like ultimate victory over death.

Exactly. And for those early Christians facing persecution, this must have been incredible, like, don't be afraid of what Rome can do. I've already conquered the worst thing they can throw at you.

That's a message of hope and defiance all wrapped up in one. It is. And it shows how Revelation isn't just about the end of the world.

It speaks to any situation where people are facing oppression or suffering. Right. It's timeless.

But we still have all this symbolism to figure out. What about those seven golden lampstands? Yeah. And the seven stars? Well, John gives us a clue.

He explains that the seven stars represent the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands. They represent the churches themselves. So the lampstands are the churches, and the stars are their angelic counterparts.

Yeah. Interesting. But does this apply to all the other symbols in Revelation? That's a great question.

And, um, this little interpretation guide actually establishes a crucial principle for understanding the rest of the book. The symbols in Revelation refer to real people and events, but they're presented in a metaphorical way. Ah, so it's like a code we need to crack to understand the deeper meaning.

Exactly. We need to pay attention to the context, the Old Testament references, and how John uses these symbols. It's a lot like a puzzle.

I like puzzles. Okay. So far in chapter one, we've got a Trinitarian God, a new Exodus, a challenge to Roman authority, and a vision of Christ that asserts his divinity and power over death.

What else does Dr. Mathewson point out in this chapter? Well, he talks about how we should interpret Revelation as a whole. And it all comes down to this phrase: what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later. I remember that.

That's where people try to map out Revelation on a timeline, right? Like chapter one is the past, chapters two and three are the present, and then the rest is the future. Yeah. A lot of people do that, but Dr. Mathewson thinks it's more nuanced than that.

Okay. He suggests this phrase might not be about a strict timeline, but about emphasizing the book's multilayered nature. Like it's about understanding the past, present, and future all in relation to each other.

So instead of a straight line, it's more like a tapestry with different threads representing different times woven together. Yeah. And remember, even in chapter one, John talks about future events.

Right. And in chapters two and three, each message to the churches, while addressing their present situation, also ends with a promise for the future. So it's not a straightforward timeline.

It's more cyclical. Right. And that makes interpreting Revelation even more interesting.

We need to pay attention to how all these threads are connected and what they tell us about the overall message. That's fascinating. And it makes me think back to the kingdom of priests and how it connects to us today.

Yeah. It seems like that concept also transcends time. It's not just about the early church.

You're right. It's about how we live out our faith in the world, no matter what time period we're in. It's about representing Christ and being a light in the darkness.

So less about rituals and more about inward transformation. Exactly. Okay.

So we've covered a lot of ground in chapter one. Are we ready to dive into those messages to the seven churches? Let's do it. But before we do, take a moment to think about everything we've talked about.

What stands out to you? What questions do you have? And we'll be back in a moment to explore those messages. Okay. We're back, and it's time to delve into these messages to the seven churches.

It's fascinating to think about these real communities trying to live out their faith under Roman rule. Yeah. They weren't just symbols.

They were real people dealing with real life situations. Right. They were facing real dilemmas.

So what stood out to you about these particular churches? Well, I find it fascinating how each church represents a different aspect of the Christian experience. Okay. Some were thriving, some were struggling.

You know, it was a mixed bag. It's like a snapshot of early Christianity in all its complexity. Do you think John intended it to be that way? Like a mirror for all Christians? I think so.

By addressing these specific churches, John provides a model for how Christians in any time or place can examine their own lives and communities. It's like he's asking us, where do we stand? Are we Smyrna? Standing strong, or are we Laodicea, lukewarm and complacent? Exactly. And it's really interesting how Jesus interacts with each church.

He commends them. He warns them. He offers encouragement.

It's like a divine performance review, but with eternal consequences. But even in the critiques, it seems like Jesus is coming from a place of love, wouldn't you say? Oh, absolutely. Remember, John saw Jesus walking among the lampstands, so he's not some distant observer.

He's intimately involved in their lives. Yeah. It's a really beautiful balance of accountability and grace.

But some churches definitely had it rougher than others. That's true. Each church represents a spectrum of spiritual health.

Some, like Smyrna and Philadelphia, receive mostly praise for their faithfulness, even though they're suffering. Yeah, like they're acing their spiritual tests. Exactly.

But even they're given warnings. You know, no church is perfect, and there's always that temptation to compromise. Right.

And then there are churches like Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea, which get a much tougher evaluation. What were their big struggles? Well, they represent those common pitfalls we can all fall into. Some had lost their first love for Christ, some were tolerating false teachings, and others had become lukewarm in their faith.

Yeah. It's like a warning to us all. We can start strong, but it's so easy to lose sight of what's really important.

But even with these struggling churches, Jesus doesn't leave them without hope, does he? Not at all. Each message ends with a promise. To the one who is victorious, I will give.

It's like a glimpse of the future glory that awaits those who persevere. So even in the midst of correction, there's that reminder of God's grace and the reward of staying faithful. It's encouraging, especially for those who are going through tough times.

Absolutely. And that's what makes Revelation so relevant for us today. It challenges us to look at our own hearts, to stand firm in our faith, to really live out this idea of being a kingdom of priests.

That idea keeps coming back. We talked about it in terms of the early church, but what does that mean for us today? We're not living under Roman rule, and we don't have literal lampstands to worry about. Right.

But the principle is still the same. The kingdom of priests is about how we live out our faith in the world. It's about representing Christ's values and being a light in the darkness wherever we are.

So it's about that inward transformation that impacts everything we do. It's about reflecting Christ's love in our families, our work, our communities. Exactly.

And Revelation is reminding us to do that faithfully, even when it's hard, even when we face opposition, because ultimately Christ holds the key to victory. That's a really powerful reminder. As we wrap up this deep dive into Revelation chapter one, I'm struck by both the urgency and the hope that John conveys.

We're called to stand firm, but also to remember that we're not alone. Christ is with us, guiding us. And in the end, he wins.

Beautifully said. And I think the takeaway here is that Revelation isn't just about decoding symbols or predicting the future. It's about participating in God's story.

It's about becoming those living embodiments of that kingdom of priests, shining our light in a world that desperately needs it. So as you go about your week, think about that. What does it mean for you to be a part of that kingdom? How can you shine your light a little brighter? Thanks for joining us on this deep dive into Revelation.